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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1634  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1464  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3573  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1177  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2064  
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0471  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 003250

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP  
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [ID](#)  
SUBJECT: INDONESIA'S LARGEST POLITICAL PARTY DITCHES  
CONVENTION IDEA

REF: A. JAKARTA 3096

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 2948

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 2021

JAKARTA 00003250 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b-d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's largest political party--Golkar--just held its annual conference in Jakarta. The party opted to scrap its presidential selection convention for 2009--a move that clearly benefits Vice President and Golkar Chair Jusuf Kalla--and pledged to support President Yudhoyono until the end of his term. The abandonment of the convention idea--used in 2004--was seen by some as a return to the politics of smoke filled rooms for Golkar. END SUMMARY.

GOLKAR PARTIES LIKE ITS 2009

[1](#)2. (C) Golkar's top party officials from throughout the archipelago's 33 provinces descended upon Jakarta for four day's worth of back slapping and party deliberations, November 22-25. The mood was festive, and party officials exulted in the knowledge that Golkar controls the vice presidency, the majority of seats in parliament, and Indonesia's most sophisticated grassroots party infrastructure. Golkar leaders had plenty to celebrate, even if the presidential palace remains elusive.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Golkar parliamentarian Yuddy Chrisnandi, Golkar officials came to the meeting with precisely one goal in mind--determining the party's presidential candidate selection mechanism for the 2009 race. While other, more general administrative issues were tackled by party officials, Chrisnandi told poloff that the selection mechanism issue was the only agenda item of consequence.

CONVENTION R.I.P.

[1](#)4. (C) In 2004, Golkar made political history by becoming the first Indonesian political party to hold a party convention to select its presidential candidate. The convention was

widely celebrated as a true democratic milestone--even if the notorious human rights abuser former General Wiranto was ultimately selected--and the symbolism of former president Suharto's party setting the democratic pace in the new era was undeniably compelling.

15. (C) Unfortunately for proponents of the convention, Vice President Kalla emerged as a powerful opponent of the convention mechanism shortly after becoming Chair of the party in 2004. According to multiple Golkar contacts, although Kalla held tremendous sway as the Vice President and party Chair, he understood that he may not be as well loved at the grassroots level. He also recognized that if he were to make a run at the presidency as the Golkar candidate--far from a guarantee at this stage--he would have to scuttle the convention idea in case he was not the party's choice. In the event of a convention, Kalla could very easily be outflanked by any number of his more popular party competitors, leaving Kalla without a vehicle to pursue the presidency--an unacceptably high level of risk for the Vice President.

16. (C) Kalla loyalist Poempida Hidayatulloh told poloff that Kalla assiduously laid the groundwork for his bid to scrap the convention in the weeks and months leading up to the meetings. During the opening ceremony, Kalla criticized the convention mechanism explicitly and then quickly went to work sabotaging it. By the time the issue was brought to a vote two days later, his efforts had succeeded, and 32 of the 33 provincial delegations ultimately voted in favor of abandoning the convention--only Yogyakarta voted to keep it. Hidayatulloh lauded the vote, and told poloff Golkar would use surveys to select the party's presidential candidate in 2009, a much more "selective" way than opening up the convention to all comers. Chrisnandi, for his part, lamented the passing of the convention, characterizing it as "a democratic" set-back for the party, a note that was also

JAKARTA 00003250 002.2 OF 002

sounded in the Indonesian media.

SUPPORT FOR SBY

17. (C) During the course of the four-day gathering, party officials repeatedly reaffirmed the party's support for the Yudhoyono administration, a vow that Kalla has made in the past. Above and beyond the decision to abandon the convention idea, Golkar representatives also announced the party would refrain from making any determinations about the presidential race until after the 2009 legislative elections (scheduled to take place in April of 2009).

SBY KEEPS FRIENDS CLOSE -- AND GOLKAR CLOSER

18. (C) President Yudhoyono closed the festivities on November 25 by addressing approximately 6000 Golkar representatives in the Jakarta convention center. The President praised Golkar's pledge to support his administration until the end of 2009 and suggested that other parties follow suit. With two years remaining until the next election, SBY noted that there was a lot of work to be done and he warned that focusing on elections too early would not be productive or in the best interests of the Indonesian people.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

19. (C) Golkar's recent annual leadership meetings laid the foundation for a possible VP Kalla presidential run in 2009. The majority of Mission contacts maintain that Kalla would prefer to remain on SBY's ticket as a VP in 2009 (see Refs A and B), but in the event SBY opts to go with another running mate, Kalla no longer has to worry about the possible wild card of a Golkar presidential selection convention. By successfully derailing the convention idea after just one go round, Kalla has basically cleared the way for the Golkar presidential nomination to be his, should he want it.

Unfortunately, Golkar appears to have moved back toward the smoked filled rooms of the past and regressed a bit in terms of democratic transparency: one Golkar contact told Pol/C that a convention was not necessary given that "Golkar represents the will of the people" in any case.

HUME